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C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000383

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: WASIT: THE VIEW FROM THE WINNER'S SEAT

REF: HILLAH 0319

CLASSIFIED BY: ALFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,
AL-HILLAH, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) Summary: In a December 27 meeting with the Deputy Regional Coordinator, Wasit Province Deputy Governor Mohammad Al-Khateeb, the top Wasit candidate on the United Iraqi alliance list (UIA, ballot number 555) spoke at length about what the December 15 election meant to the citizens of Wasit in particular, and Iraq in general. Unverified initial election results show the UIA took approximately 125 seats nationally, and seven of the eight allocated to Wasit. Al-Khateeb said that he was "disappointed that the UIA had not done better," but was confident that "a strong coalition would emerge from the negotiations going on in Baghdad." End Summary.

2. (C) Al-Khateeb, a self-described independent, is from a prominent family in Wasit, but is not known to be affiliated with either the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) or the Badr Organization, traditional wellsprings of political candidates in the Shi'a heartland. A relative newcomer to politics, Al-Khateeb was elected to the Wasit Provincial Council in 2004 and as Deputy Governor in April 2005.

3. (C) He related that he had just returned to Al-Kut from Baghdad, where he had been participating in the negotiations on posts within the new government and coalition building with other lists. He predicted that the Kurds would keep the Presidency and the semi-autonomy they had earned in negotiations during the Transitional National Assembly (TNA), but that with the UIA's strong showing in the December 15 elections, the Kurds would be unlikely to gain any additional concessions for their agenda. When questioned whether he thought Dr. Jaafari would keep the premiership, he said, "I think that Dr. Jaafari has done an excellent job, but we may need someone who can deal with other entities in Iraq." When asked to name a candidate he thought might be acceptable, he countered, "who do you have in mind, Ahmad Chalabi?" (Note: It was unclear from the conversation whether this remark was an accusation of U.S. support for Chalabi, or a hint that the UIA would support him. End note.)

4. (C) On Sunni participation in the election and their eventual role in the government, he claimed to welcome the opportunity to work with all parties concerning a free and united Iraq, but that the Sunnis should not seek too many concessions until they had roven heselvesby reouncig terrorism.

5. (C) In Wasit, Al-Khateeb predicted an end to political in-fighting between SCIRI and Wasit supporters of Moqtada Al-Sadr over the new IP (Iraqi Police) Chief (reftel). Al-Khateeb maintained that "the interested parties," as well as the people and the IP rank and file, have accepted the chief because of his withdrawal from the Badr Corps, which mollified the Sadrists, and his handling of Election Day security preparations. (Note: the Deputy Governor acknowledged that there is speculation among other members of the Provincial Council (PC) that his withdrawal was stage-anaged to esurehis cceptnce by Sadrits on the PC. End Note.)

6. (C) Al-Khateeb claimed that the landslide UIA victory in Wasit, in which the coalition apparently won seven of the eight National Assembly seats allocated to the province, would produce Wasit National Assembly (NA) representation determined to provide their home province with additional funding for reconstruction and development. Al-Khateeb avowed that this support extended to the mixed Sunni-Shi'a area of northern Wasit, claiming that, "now that the Sunnis have entered the political process, we must work together to stop the fighting and bloodshed." However, the Deputy Governor said that such support was contingent on the Sunnis committing to the political process with "acts, and not words."

7. (C) Comment: Al-Khateeb was clearly delighted with the early election results. When asked about Election Day voting irregularities nationwide, he just smiled. Al-Khateeb said that as an independent elected to office from within the UIA slate, he was working on bringing smaller parties with limited gains in the NA into the UIA fold. He added that as independents, he and others might have influence on the coalition building within the UIA. Al-Khateeb is a relatively junior member of the UIA and it

is hard to predict to what extent he may be able to influence events on the national level, or if his comments were just post-election euphoria. End Comment.

FONTENEAU